

RTF C23-1

## **Experimental Film: History and Aesthetics**

Fall 93

1-3 Tu Th

119 Louis Hall

Chuck Kleinhans

office: 316 AMS, 491-2255; 491-7315

office hours 10-12 W and by appointment

TA: Rick Wojcik

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office hours: TBA

enrollment limit: 60; permission of instructor required. Students must attend first class. Prerequisite: undergrad majors completion of A and B level requirements; nonmajors RTF B20; grads: permission of instructor.

An introduction to the history and aesthetics of the film avant garde from the 1920s in Europe to contemporary US work. Emphasis is on exploring the range of experimental film practice and developing critical and aesthetic concepts for discussing avant garde work. This course is a prerequisite for C23-2, Experimental Film and Video, which will be offered winter quarter which will examine personal, autobiographical and diary work in film and video, experimental expository forms, and the history of video art. C23-2 can be completed with creative work.

The course combines screenings, lectures, discussions, readings, and off campus screenings. Films are the main texts for the course. Films will be screened in class and cannot be seen at other times. Thus attendance is important and will help determine the grade. During the third and fourth weeks of class the usual Thursday class will not meet. Instead students **must** attend Wednesday and Thursday evening screenings on campus in the Annie May Swift auditorium being held in conjunction with the Block Gallery's Fluxus show.

Assigned work includes 5 reports on field work in Chicago's experimental film and video scene and adjoining art world, an in-class midterm and an in-class final. Grad students will do additional reading and writing, including a take-home final.

Required books (available at Norris Center Store)

Sitney, P. Adams, **Visionary Film: The American Avant-garde, 1943-1978**. Oxford paperback

Rabinovitz, Lauren, **Points of Resistance: Women, Power and Politics in the New York Avant-garde Cinema, 1943-71**. Illinois paperback

additional text for grad students:

James, David E. **Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties**. Princeton paperback

week one

### 21 Sept

Stan Brakhage, **Mothlight** (Canyon, \$11) (1963, color, silent, 4 min.)

Scott Bartlett, **Moon 1969** (NU video) (1969, 16mm color/sound, 15 min.)

Chris Marker, **La Jettée** (NU video) (France, c. 1965, b&w, sound, c. 15 min.)

Paul Sharits, **T,o,u,c,h,i,n,g** (Canyon, \$30) (1968, sound, color, 12 min.)

Harry Smith, **Early Abstractions 1, 2, 3, 4** (CK pers copy video) (1939-46, 1950, c. 10 min.)

### 23 Sept

**read** Berger, John. "The Moment of Cubism," in Berger, The Moment of Cubism and Other Essays. (2 hour reserve)

Kirby, Michael. "The Aesthetics of the Avant-Garde," in Kirby, The Art of Time. 1969 (2 hour reserve)

Sitney 1-19

Sara Kathryn Arledge, **Introspection** (Canyon, \$15) (1941, color, sound, 7 min.)

Maya Deren, **Meshes of the Afternoon** (NU) (1943, b&w, silent, 14 min.)

Marie Menken, **Visual Variations on Noguchi** (FMC, \$25) (c. 1945? b&w, silent, 4 min.)

Brakhage, **Window Water Baby Moving** (NU) (1959, color, silent, 12 min.)

week two

### 28 Sept

**read:** Rabinovitz 1-36; Sitney 91-135

Harry Smith, **Early Abstractions, 5, 7, 10** (CK pers copy video) (1950, 57-62, c. 10 min.)

Kenneth Anger, **Scorpio Rising** (Canyon, \$60) (1964, color, sound, 29 min.)

Gunvor Nelson, **Moon's Pool** (Canyon, \$35) (1973, color, sound, 15 min.)

### 30 Sept

Man Ray, **Retour à la Raison** (NU Video) (1923, b&w, silent, 3 min.)

Rene Clair, **Entr'acte** (NU) (1924, b&w, silent 14 min.)

Robert Florey and Slavko Vorkapitch, **Life and Death of 9413, A Hollywood Extra** (NU video) (1928, b&w, silent, 11 min.)

Luis Bunuel & Salvador Dali, **Un Chien Andalou** (An Andalousian Dog) (NU) (1928, b&w silent, 16 min.)

week three

### 5 Oct

**read** Sitney 220-304

Hans Richter, **From Dada to Surrealism: 40 Years of Experiment** (MoMA, \$125)

contains: **Symphonie Diagonale** (exerpt) by Viking Eggeling, Germany 1922;

**Rythmus 21** (1921, Germany, 3 min b&w sound); **Filmstudie** (1926, Germany, 4 min. B&W sound); **Inflation** (exerpt) 1928, Germany 4 min. B&W. sound;

**Rennsymphonie** 1928 Germany, 5 min. b&w, sound; **Twopence Magic**

(Zweigroschenzauber), 1929 Germany, 2 min., b&w, sound; **Everything Turns,**

**Everything Revolves** (exerpt) 1929 Germany, 4 min b&w sound; **Ghosts Before Breakfast** (1928 6 min. B&w, sound --music by Paul Hindemith); **Dreams that**

**Money Can Buy** (Desire episode) 1947 10 min color sound Inspired by and with a monologue written by Max Ernst. Music by Paul Bowles; **8 X 8** (Black Schemes episode) 1957 Switzerland, 13 min. Color, sound; **Dadascope** (La Chanson Dada episode) 4 min. color, sound.

## 7 Oct

**read:** Rabinovitz 37-48

James Sibley Watson and Melville Weber, **Lot in Sodom**, (NU video)

John Flory and Theodore Huff, **Mr. Motorboat's Last Stand** (CK video, personal copy, 1933, 16mm, b&w silent, c. 15 min.)

Maya Deren, **Meshes of the Afternoon** (NU) (1943/59, b&w, sound, 14 min.)

Sidney Peterson, **The Cage**, (Canyon, \$45) (1947, b&w, sound, 25 min.)

week four

## 12 Oct

**read:** Rabinovitz 49-91; Sitney 20-46

Maya Deren, **At Land** (NU) (1944, b&w, silent, 15 min)

Maya Deren, **A Study in Choreography for the Camera** (FMC, \$28) (1945, b&w silent, 4 min)

Maya Deren, **Ritual in Transfigured Time** (FMC, \$40) (1945-6, b&w, silent, 15 min.)

Maya Deren, **Meditation on Violence** (FMC, \$40) (1948. b&w, sound, 12 min.)

\*\*\*\*\* **Wed. 13 Oct** 8pm Annie May Swift auditorium

Fluxus show no 1

## 14 Oct

\*\*\*\*\* No class in afternoon, screening at 8pm Annie May Swift auditorium

Fluxus show no 2

week five

## 19 Oct

**read:** Sitney 47-92; 305-329

Sara Kathryn Arledge, **What is a Man?** (FMC, \$20) (1958. color, sound, 10 min.)

Edward Bland, **The Cry of Jazz** (CK video, personal copy) (1959, b&w, sound, c. 20 min.)

**New American Cinema: Shirley Clarke** (CK video, personal copy) (tv series, 1972, 60 min.)

\*\*\*\*\* **Wed. 20 Oct** 8pm Annie May Swift auditorium

Fluxus show no 3

**21 Oct** no afternoon class 8pm Annie May Swift auditorium

Fluxus show no 4

week six

## 26 Oct

### midterm

James Broughton, **The Bed** (NU video) (1968, color, sound, 19 min.)

Gunvor Nelson, **My Name is Oona** (Canyon, \$20) (1969, b&w, sound, 9.5 min)

## 28 Oct

**read:** Rabinovitz, 94-149

Shirley Clarke, **Dance in the Sun** (MoMA, \$25) (1953, color, sound, 6 min.)

Shirley Clarke, **A Moment in Love** (MoMA, \$25) 1957, color, sound, 8 min.)

Shirley Clarke, **Bridges Go Round** (MoMA, \$25) (1958, color, sound-2 versions, 8 min.)

Shirley Clarke, **Portrait of Jason** (excerpt) (Chuck, pers. copy) (1967, b&w, sound)

Shirley Clarke w/ Joseph Chaikin and Sam Shepard, **Tongues** (NUV) (1981?, video, 20 min.)

Shirley Clarke, **Ornette Coleman: Made in America** (NU, excerpts, video) (1985)

week seven

**2 Nov**

Shirley Clarke, **The Connection** (NU video) (1961

**4 Nov**

**read:** Sitney 330-368

Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wylie, **Schmeerguntz** (Canyon, \$25) (1966, b&w, sound, 15 min.)

Jack Smith, **Flaming Creatures** (Canyon, \$125) (1963, b&w, sound, 45 min)

week eight

**9 Nov**

**read:** Sitney 369-397

Hollis Frampton, **Poetic Justice (Hapax Legomena II)** (FMC, \$63) (1972, b&w, silent, 31 min.)

David Brooks, **The Wind is Driving Him toward the Open Sea** (FMC \$60) (1968, 52 min.)

**11 Nov**

**read:** Sitney 398-446

**New American Cinema: Scott Bartlett**, (CK pers. copy) (1972, 60 min)

Scott Bartlett, **1970** (NU video)

week nine

**16 Nov**

grad students: 2-3 pp notes due on outside reading with copies for other grads

**read:** Rabinovitz 150-215

Joyce Wieland, **Water Sark** (FMC, \$21) (1965, color, sound-on-tape, 14 min.)

Joyce Wieland, **Sailboat** (Canyon, \$6) (1967, color, sound, 3 min.)

Joyce Wieland, **Rat Life and Diet in North America** (FMC, \$24) (1968, color, sound, 16 min.)

Joyce Wieland, **Solidarity** (Canyon, \$15) (1973, color, sound, 11 min.)

**18 Nov**

**read:** Sitney 136-172

Bruce Baillie, **Valentine de las Sierras** (NU video) (19 color, sound, 10 min.)

Bruce Baillie, **All My Life** (NU video)(1966, color, sound, 3 min)

Bruce Baillie, **Mass for the Dakota Sioux** (NU video)(1963-64, b&w, sound, 20 min.)

Bruce Baillie, **Castro Street** (NU video)(1966. color and b&w, sound, 10 min.)

week ten

**23 Nov**

George Kuchar, **Hold Me While I'm Naked** (NU video)

Curt McDowell, **The Weiners and Buns Musical**, (Canyon, \$35) (1971, b&w, sound, 16 min.)

Lennie Lipton, **Doggie Diner and the Return of Doggie Diner** (Canyon, \$10) (1969, color, sound, 7 min)

Richard Kern and Lydia Lunch, **The Right Side of my Brain** (CK pers copy) (c. 1984, S8mm/ video, 30 min.)

25 Nov holiday

week eleven

**30 Nov.**

read: conclusion of Rabinovitz

Ernie Gehr, **Shift** (Canyon, \$18) (1972-74, color, sound, 9 min.)

Peter Rose, **Analogies: Studies in the Movement of Time** (NU ) (1977, 14 min. color/sound)

Peter Rose: **Digital Speech**, (NUV)

Peter Rose, **Pressures of the Text** (NUV)

**2 Dec**

Course evaluation

exam questions handed out

Paul Glabicki, **Film-Wipe-Film** (NU video) (1984, color, sound, 28 min.)

Paul Glabicki, **Object Conversation** (NU video) (1985, color, sound, 10 min.)

Bruce Baillie, **Roslyn Romance (Is It Really True?)** (Canyon, \$45) (1974, color, sound, 17 min.)

Bruce Baillie, **The P-38 Pilot** (NU video) (1990, film on video, 15 min.)

Marisol Trujillo, **A Prayer** (NU video) (Cuba, 1970?, b&w/ sound, c. 5 min)

**Final Exam**

Grad students and those who are writing a take home exam must turn in a 2500 word essay based on one of the exam questions before noon Dec 6. All others will take an in-class exam. In other words, no late papers, no incompletes.

**M Dec 6 12-2**

Because the films screened are usually not available elsewhere, such as at regular video stores, it is very important to attend class. Students with repeated absences will probably find it difficult or impossible to complete the course. If you have problems attending, talk about it ASAP with the TA and/or Prof.

Assignments. All students are required to turn in **five** reports of about 500-750 words on outside screening events. Two must be turned in before the midterm. The reports may be subjective or objective, concentrate on the overall experience or just one film/ tape, etc. There will be a list of suitable screenings/ events posted outside of Chuck's office. The

purpose of these fieldwork assignments is to give students additional screenings and experiences in Chicago's avant garde art and media community. Undergrads turn in reports to TA; grads to Chuck. 25% of final grade for undergrads, 20% for grads.

Grad students have an additional assignment (15% of final grade), which is to do additional outside reading, equivalent to a book. Students must prepare a 2-3 page set of notes, questions, or topics related to the outside reading (for distribution to the other grads) (due 16 Nov. in class) and the David James book. The grad students will meet with Chuck for a two hour seminar during the ninth week for a discussion of issues in avant garde history and criticism.

The following books have been placed on reserve for the course:

Battcock, Gregory, ed. The New American Cinema: A Critical Anthology. NY: E. P. Dutton, 1967.

\*\*\*Berger, John. "The Moment of Cubism," in Berger, The Moment of Cubism and Other Essays. (2 hour reserve)

Clarke, Vèvè, et. al., The Legend of Maya Deren, Volume 1, part two, Chambers, 1942-47, NY: Anthology Film Archives, 1988. [ISBN 0-911689-17-6]

Dwoskin, Stephen. Film Is: The International Free Cinema. Woodstock NY: Overlook Press, 1975.

Ehrenstein, David. Film: The Front Line, 1984. Denver: Arden Press, 1984.

Gidal, Peter. Materialist Film. London: Routledge, 1989.

Hanhardt, John G., ed. A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema. NY: American Federation of Arts, 1976.

James, David E. Allegories Of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties. Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1989.

\*\*\*Kirby, Michael. "The Aesthetics of the Avant-Garde," in Kirby, The Art of Time. 1969 (2 hour reserve)

LeGrice, Malcolm. Abstract Film and Beyond. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1977.

Macdonald, Scott. A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers. Berkeley: U of California, 1988.

Macdonald, Scott. A Critical Cinema 2: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers. Berkeley: U of California, 1992.

Macdonald, Scott. Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies. Cambridge, Cambridge U.P. 1993.

Mekas, Jonas. Movie Journal: The Rise of a New American Cinema, 1959-1971. NY: Collier, 1972.

O'Pray, Michael, ed. Andy Warhol: Film Factory. London: British Film Institute, 1989.

Renan, Sheldon. An Introduction to the American Underground Film. NY: E. P. Dutton, 1967.

Rosenbaum, Jonathan. Film: The Front Line, 1983. Denver: Arden Press, 1983.

Rowe, Carol. The Baudelairean Cinema: A Trend within the American Avant-Garde. Ann Arbor: UMI Research, 1982.

Russett, Robert, and Cecile Starr. Experimental Animation: An Illustrated Anthology. NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976.

Schneemann, Carolee. More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings. New Paltz, NY: Documentext, 1979.

Sitney, P. Adams, ed. Film Culture Reader. NY: Praeger, 1970.

Sitney, P. Adams, ed. The Essential Cinema: Essays on the Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives. Vol. 1. NY: New York U. P., 1975.

Sitney, P. Adams, ed. The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism. NY: New York U. P., 1978.

Tyler, Parker. Underground Film: A Critical History. NY: Grove, 1969.

Vogel, Amos. Film As A Subversive Art. NY: Random House, 1974.

Youngblood, Gene. Expanded Cinema. NY: Dutton, 1970.

Exams. The midterm will count 30% of the final grade and consists of short answers of readings and screenings plus writing a short essay (in class) on a film to be shown in class. (25% for Grads) The final (35% of final grade) will be in two parts: writing an essay after seeing an unannounced film (about 40 min). The second part is over the entire course--screenings, readings, lectures and discussion.

Final grade formula:

undergrads--discussion 10%, five outside screening reports 25%; midterm 30%, final 35%.  
grads--discussion 10%, midterm 25%, five outside screening reports 20%; reading report 15%, final 30%.

How to get to the outside screenings (phone first!):

**Experimental Film Coalition.** Screens occasionally at Randolph Street Gallery. 666-7737. 756 N. Milwaukee Ave. Drive: Ridge to Ashland, Ashland to Milwaukee/Division/Ashland. S. on Milwaukee, about 2 blocks south of Chicago Ave.

Parking on the street and across the street. El/bus. Chicago el stop is closed at night. Best bet is el to the Loop, then Milwaukee Ave. bus to gallery (phone CTA for exact info). Typical of artists as the shock troops of gentrification, this is part of a new cluster of galleries in not a great neighborhood; try to make the first show if you're alone or on public transportation (there are usually several folks at the bus stop heading back to the Loop after the show; if the wind is right, you can smell the fresh bread from the bakery a block away).

**Chicago Filmmakers** (312-384-5533; 1543 W. Division) Filmmakers has recently moved to the Wicker Park Area and is located at the intersection of Division, Milwaukee, and Ashland. This is a major stop on the Northwest rapid transit line (O'Hare), so just go downtown and then back out towards O'Hare. If driving, Ashland south to Division, however I wouldn't advise parking south of Division. The side streets are dark. You'd probably do better to try to park on Milwaukee, which is quite busy N. of Division, or on Division w of Ashland. CF recommends a city meter lot one block E of Milwaukee. After the show you can head up Milwaukee to the Damen/North/Milwaukee intersection which is proliferating theatres, coffee houses, and other boho businesses.

**Film Center, School of the Art Institute of Chicago.** Columbus and Jackson, 443-3737. (behind the Museum) Drive: Outer Drive to Monroe, west to Columbus Drive, park on Columbus or Monroe St. garage (offers escort to car at night). El: exit at Jackson, east to Columbus (over the IC tracks). The school has a cafeteria and machines. Grant Park can be a fairly deserted area at night, if you park there, be alert. The Film Center is on the second floor)

**Facets Multimedia.** 1517 W. Fullerton. 281-4114. Drive: Outer Drive to Fullerton, west to Facets. Or Ridge to Ashland, Ashland to Fullerton, east one block. El/bus: exit at Fullerton. Take Fullerton bus West. This is a gentrifying neighborhood, with a few restaurants, coffee shops and bars, mostly on Fullerton, but if you go back east to Halsted/Lincoln/Fullerton there are a lot of live music bars, restaurants, etc. Note: Facets is notorious for having the worst projection in Chicago; expect anything; you won't be too surprised (but everyone in the media community has horror stories). They do have an outstanding selection of video tapes for rental/sale--lots of European films, etc. One of the very best video rental places in the country.

some other venues may be announced; The Chicago Latino Film Festival, the Chicago International Film Festival, and the Chicago Lesbian and GAY Festival will all take place this fall; updated information will be posted outside Chuck's office.

For the first assignment, students may choose either the current show at the Museum of Contemporary Art (near north, off Michigan Ave.) or the galleries of 20th Century painting at the Art Institute (Michigan at Adams). The Art Institute is hosting a special exhibition of Max Ernst, the Dada and Surrealist artist until Nov. 30; highly recommended. Free Tuesday.

# Experimental Film: Concepts for Analysis

The films we'll be looking at vary significantly from the usual dramatic narrative and documentary modes. Here are some concepts that can help you experience and analyze them.

Theme, rather than story, is often the uniting structural factor. "Theme" can be a recurring visual motif or can reside in the conceptual content of related images. *MOTHLIGHT* has a beginning, middle, and end, but no narrative. *WAVELENGTH* has a few human incidents, but that story is not very significant for the whole work.

When there is a story, it is often told with an interior or psychological logic rather than a "realistic" plot (*MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON*, *THE SEASHELL AND THE CLERGYMAN*, *ANDALUSIAN DOG*).

The link between images is usually associational rather than descriptive or discursive. (*REPORT, WINDOW WATER BABY MOVING*) The logic of image relationships is based on content rather than chronology—that is, the logic of dream and poetry. (*BRIDGES GO ROUND*)

Little attempt is made to preserve the illusion of real time or real space. The expressive rearrangement of actual space and time is the norm. (*ANALOGIES*) Or, real time and space can be used to break from the conventions of Hollywood or "realist" presentation. (*JEANNE DIELMAN*) Often the experimental film generates a new time-space context of its own.

Frequently, technical or abstract elements of the medium such as camera movement, zooming, focus, cutting rhythm, direction of object movement, rate of object movement, color, shape, texture, superimposition are exploited as primary compositional elements, with the image content, or "meaning," being of secondary importance. This is the reverse of narrative film practice. (*WAVELENGTH*, *FUJI*)

The relation between sound and image tends to be based more often on analogy or contrast or contradiction than on reality. (*SCORPIO RISING*)

The statement made or the vision presented is most often the personal one of an individual artist working directly in the medium, rather than supervising a group of hired technicians. Often the "voice" used is the personal one we find in lyric poetry: we sense the maker is speaking directly to us rather than through a "third person" or dramatic narration (*WINDOW WATER BABY MOVING*, *FUSES*, *PULL MY DAISY*)

Appreciation and understanding of the experimental film requires a different method of "reading." A mind set in the viewer akin to the one adopted in reading poetry or listening to music is usually most appropriate.

Often the maker seeks to change viewer consciousness or to operate on a different level of conscious/unconscious activity than is normal. Everyone has access to a range of different states of consciousness, experimental film often seeks access to one or several of those states.

While many experimental works clearly avoid the goal of "entertainment" this does not mean that they do not give pleasure. Often the pleasure is defined in a different way, however. Sometimes unpleasure is used as a deliberate element to affect the viewer (the sound track in WAVELENGTH).

The film artist is often trying to change viewer consciousness by breaking both formal expectations and content expectations. Taboo breaking content is frequently used to shock or surprise or provoke laughter. This can lead to new thought and new (aesthetic) experience. (This is one of the main arguments in Amos Vogel's book.)

Often the social environment depicted is one deliberately set to run against the expectations of "normal" middle class manners and values. (SCORPIO RISING, FUSES, PULL MY DAISY)

Sometimes the films are deliberately puzzling: sometimes there is a solution to the puzzle, but often there is not. On first viewing, it can be a mistake to try to "put it all together" right away because the duration of puzzlement may be something being used in a creative way. Similarly, trying to find exact meanings for symbols (as in Maya Deren's work) may limit your appreciation. The power of such symbols is often that they mean several things, or mean different things at different moments in the work.

With the above in mind, it will often be useful to ask yourself questions such as:

What is the main feeling or image that the film leaves in your mind? What is the overall mood of the film? How is that achieved? What meanings does it suggest?

What are the key images or symbols recurring in the film? Do they have a common element? Is there a thread connecting the associations set up in your mind?

On the technical/abstract level, what are the main recurrent motifs? How are they organized?

What's done with time? Is there an impression of chronological development? Is time broken up and rearranged? What effect does the use of time have on the overall image presented by the film?

What's done with space? Is space coherent in the film? Is it rearranged? What effect does the use of space have on the overall effect of the film?

What is done with the sound track (if there is one)? How are voice, sound, and music used in relation to each other and in relation to the image track?

What motivates or directs the changes from shot to shot, sequence to sequence? What patterns emerge in viewing?

Does the film have a structure? What defines this?

How does the film develop over time?

How does the film "educate" you to understand its aesthetics?